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Emotion in Work Settings

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“Text”

(for guidance, please see the file “Notes for authors”)

(iii) **Encyclopedic essays** of 1000-2000 words, 10-20 references, 2-4 state-of-the-art readings, and 2-3 illustrations. These entries are called E (for Encyclopedic) entries.

Affect in organizations was widely studied in the 1930, but then faded. After a period of relative neglect it was taken up so intensely towards the end of the 20th century that an "affective revolution" in organizational psychology research has been proclaimed (Barsade, Brief, & Spataro, 2003). The revolution involves a growing interest in emotional dynamics in work and organizations, and recognition that emotions are relevant to multiple facets and levels of organizational life (Brief & Weiss, 2002).

There are two notable exceptions to the long neglect of "feelings at work". First, job satisfaction, historically an important topic in organizational psychology, has been regarded as an affective reaction of people towards their work. However, there are good arguments for regarding job satisfaction as a cognitive rather than an emotional response as it is known to involve an evaluation of working conditions and characteristics, such as work autonomy, variety or feedback, supervision, promotion opportunities, and social relationships at work. Job satisfaction involves assessments that weigh the pro's and cons of these features in a process far less spontaneous than the idea of immediate, situation-based feelings and emotions at work. The spontaneous nature of affect at work is clearly and powerfully delineated by Affective Events Theory (cf. Brief & Weiss, 2002).

A second exception is research on stress at work, where negative emotions are key (Lazarus and Cohen-Carash, 2001). Pertinent research often does not focus on specific emotions but on negative emotions and feelings in general, or on families of negative emotions. In many studies, however, these emotions are not measured directly; rather, stress research focuses on more trait-like aspects of affect such as depression, irritability, or generally negative affect (cf. Semmer, McGrath, & Beehr, 2005), assuming negative emotional states as mediators of more generalized reaction tendencies. Only recently have stress researchers started to investigate stressful events and the immediate emotional reactions

they evoke. Such investigations sometimes use rather general emotional reactions (e.g. Grebner, Elfering, Semmer *et al.*, 2004), and at other times address specific emotions, such as anger (Keenan & Newton, 1985).

The study of emotion in organizations focuses primarily on the antecedents and consequences of individual affect, drawing on research in the psychology of emotion, with a small subset of research focusing on emotion beyond the individual, including emotion in work groups or in organizations (e.g., Kelly & Barsade, 2001).

To discuss current state of research on emotion at work one needs to address four questions: (a) what emotions do people feel? (b) Why do people feel these emotions? (c) What are the effects of experiencing these emotions? (d) What is the relationship between emotions felt and emotions expressed?

(a) *What emotions do people feel at work?*

Work is associated with a wide range of affective reactions, including general feeling states that can be positive (pleasure, happiness) or negative (displeasure, frustration), but also specific emotions (anger, frustration, joy, excitement). Little research is available about general, everyday emotions at work (Scherer, Wranik, Sangsue, Tran, & Scherer, 2004), and estimations about the frequency of different distinct emotions felt depend on the methodology used. For example, Fisher, (2002), who asked people to rate the occurrence of distinct emotions, observed more positive than negative emotions at work. However, when other researchers asked participants to report every event that elicited *strong* feelings at work, they reported slightly more negative than positive emotions, with frustration being the most intense negative, and liking the most intense positive emotion (Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002).

Disturbingly, it appears that people experience a higher proportion of negative emotions at work than in private life. Experience sampling studies showed that people enjoy activities related to working less than most other activities, with the exception of commuting

from and to work and housework (Stone, 2006). More generally, moods are lower on working days than on days off. On the other hand, experiences of 'flow' (described as 'optimal experience' characterized by feeling active, alert, concentrated, happy and satisfied) are three times more likely to be experienced at work than in other settings (Csikszentmihalyi & LeFevre, 1989).

In the work setting, anger seems to be an often experienced negative emotion (Scherer et al., 2004), most often caused by interactions with clients, colleagues and superiors. Pride is also an important emotion at work, as it was associated with 25% of events reported in one study (Grandey et al., 2002).

(b) *Why do people feel these emotions?*

Generally speaking, the instigators of specific emotions at work are the same as outside work. Thus, injustice promotes anger (Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005), success promotes pride, and internal attributions of stressful events promote shame or embarrassment. Research on specific emotions at work and their triggers at work are sparse (Lazarus and Cohen-Charash, 2001), with Basch & Fisher (2000) representing a notable exception. Their data show, for instance, that goal achievement was one of the most important instigators of positive emotions, including pleasure, happiness, enthusiasm, relief, optimism, and power. Receiving recognition was second, being associated with pleasure, happiness, pride, enthusiasm, and affection. For negative emotions, acts of colleagues and acts of management were by far the most frequent events (representing 37 and 28%) of all events recalled; they were associated with all negative emotions measured. Making mistakes, on the other hand, was associated with only one emotion, that is, embarrassment.

Dasborough (2006) asked for open descriptions for positive and negative interactions between supervisors and employees, deriving such categories as “awareness and respect”, “motivation and inspiration”, “empowerment”, “communication”, or “reward/recognition”.

The bulk of emotions reported referred to “happy / pleased” and “comforted / calm / relaxed”, which together constituted 421 of the 520 positive emotional reactions. Admiration and excitement / enthusiasm occurred less frequently. The positive emotions are predominantly in the low / middle arousal domain, according to the well-known emotional circumplex. Negative emotions appear to be experienced in a more differentiated way than positive ones, and are typically triggered by communication that is ineffective (e.g., failing to inform) or inappropriate (yelling, blaming), by lack of awareness and respect, and by lack of empowerment. The most typical emotional negative reactions reported to Dasborough (2006) were annoyance / anger and frustration.

Research on stress at work also points to social situations, such as interpersonal conflict, as key negative events. Also frequently reported as negative is “waste of time and effort”, which refers to work that is done in vain (for instance, because the specified requirements were changed and then reverted to the original again), and work overload. Similar to Dasborough’s (2006) results, emotional reactions to such negative events are anger, annoyance, and frustration. Importantly, however, participants often cannot recall a negative event that happened during the last two weeks (Keenan & Newton, 1985), implying either that none occurred or that they were not serious enough to be remembered.

Thus, social relations, both with colleagues and supervisors, appear to be frequent triggers of emotions, both positive and negative. A topic repeatedly surfacing is respect and appreciation, or lack thereof (cf. Semmer, et al., 2005), which points to the importance of justice and fairness in determining emotions (cf. Weiss, Suckow, & Cropanzano, 1999).

(c) *What are the effects of the emotions that people feel?*

Emotions felt at work can have wide range of implications (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Strong affect may lead to “intrusions”, which compete for cognitive capacity and may interfere with performance. Although (mild) negative affect sometimes has positive

consequences (Forgas, 2002), positive mood is a more likely source of positive impact on social interactions, helping behavior, creativity, decision making, and dealing with difficult situations (Brief & Weiss, 2002). These effects are, however, not uniform and depend on a variety of personal and contextual characteristics (Forgas, 2002).

Experiencing negative affect typically is associated with poor social interaction and negotiating behaviors, reduced motivation and performance, lower creativity, and increased withdrawal behavior, such as turnover (Brief & Weiss, 2002). In the longer term affect is also related to health consequences (Semmer, et al., 2005). Less is known with regard to specific emotions, but anger mediates between perceptions of injustice and retaliatory behavior (Barclay et al., 2005), and is related to health consequences such as coronary heart disease (Semmer et al., 2005). Fostering positive emotions, and avoiding high amounts of stress, can therefore pay off both for organizations and their employees.

d) Emotion work: Being obliged to express or hide certain emotions

Work requirements often specify the emotions that employees are expected to display, independent of how they actually feel, an idea discussed as emotion work or emotional labour (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). For instance, bill collectors and criminal interrogators must display negative emotions (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991), and employees in sales or customer service roles must display happiness and good cheer as part of their work, because such emotion displays are presumed to improve sales. Some research has shown that displaying positive emotions by service providers positively influences customers presumably through an emotion contagion process (e.g. Pugh, 2001). But managerial presumptions about role-appropriate emotions are rarely challenged, and there is evidence of invalid assumptions regarding the precise emotional displays that can promote organization effectiveness; for example, the requirements and effect of emotional displays on customers can depend on situational factors, such as busy stores or crowded restaurants (Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). Employee selection and especially

training and socialization appear to be key determinants of emotion displayed in organizations, though there also appear to be contextual influences such as how busy an individual is, or how demanding a particular task is (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990).

If an emotion that has to be displayed is not genuinely felt, emotion regulation processes are required. Hochschild (1983) suggested two main emotion regulation strategies: *Surface acting* involves hiding the emotions actually felt and displaying the required emotion; the regulation effort consists of hiding the spontaneous expression of the felt emotion and 'faking' the desired emotion. *Deep acting* involves a reappraisal of the situation, for example in empathizing with a difficult customer. After such a reappraisal, the display of the required emotion is authentic, because the underlying feeling has been changed. A third possibility is to show "deviance from the required emotion" (Tschan, Rochat, & Zapf, 2005), that is, to display the felt emotion despite the requirement to the contrary.

Emotion work requirements per se have been found to have negative effects on well-being, including burnout and other stress symptoms (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983), although some authors report or suggest also positive effects of display rules, especially if there is a requirement to display positive emotions (Zapf & Holz, 2006). The most straining aspect related to emotion work is experiencing emotional dissonance – dissonance between emotions felt and display rules, and thus having to regulate one's emotional display. Especially for surface acting, the relationship to impaired well-being has been well established. These negative effects could be due to suppressing of the emotion per se but also to its effects on interaction behaviour, which may carry the risk of being detected as inauthentic (Grandey, 2003).

Further research on emotions at work should focus on both situational and more permanent aspects, trying to integrate within-person and between-person approaches (Beal, Weiss, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005). Furthermore, it should better connect the various fields

involved, such as the psychology of emotions, occupational stress research, research on emotional labor, and research on justice.

State-of-the-art readings

Ashkanasy, N.M., Härtel, C.E.J., & Zerbe, W.J. (Eds.).(2000). Emotions in the workplace: Research, theory, and practice. London: Quorum Books.

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